

types of reforms are best for their constituencies.

This "patient-driven" approach—with insurance reforms and changes in the tax treatment of health insurance—should make health insurance more affordable. And it should significantly reduce the number of the uninsured.

During my tenure in the Senate, I have sought to build bridges between Republicans and Democrats. I believe that there are times where Republicans and Democrats need to come together to produce results.

An example of my efforts to work in a bipartisan manner is the bipartisan SCHIP legislation that was overwhelmingly passed by this body. In the spirit of bipartisanship, I join Senator WYDEN in cosponsoring the Healthy Americans Act. The Healthy Americans Act is a "patient-driven" approach to reforming our health care system.

While I support this "patient-driven" approach, I have serious concerns about a number of the provisions of the Healthy Americans Act. For example, like many of the Democratic Presidential candidates, the act would require all individuals to buy health insurance. I support accessibility to private insurance and differ with my colleagues on this point. Also, Senator WYDEN's approach is more regulatory than I would prefer.

In addition, I am not endorsing the repeal of the noninterference clause in Medicare Part D. That is not going to be on the table. So my cosponsorship is not an endorsement of these elements. Instead, I am cosponsoring the Healthy Americans Act to add my voice to the call for significant changes in our health care system.

What we have here is Republicans and Democrats coming together to solve a problem. This is what bipartisanship is all about. We are all on the same page when it comes to the big picture; that is, reforming our health care system and expanding access to health insurance.

We have serious problems, and we need serious people to solve them. So let's put politics aside, roll up our sleeves and work in a bipartisan way to reform our health care system.

Make no mistake, my cosponsorship of the Healthy Americans Act is only one step in the process. I intend to work with Senators BURR, COBURN, MARTINEZ, CORKER, and DOLE on their health care reform proposal. I intend to work with Chairman BAUCUS and members of the Senate Finance Committee on small business health reforms, along with more comprehensive health care reform proposals like the Healthy Americans Act. Let's get serious.

#### HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I wish today to pay tribute to the contributions of Hispanic Americans as we commemorate Hispanic Heritage Month. This occasion welcomes the oppor-

tunity to celebrate the achievements made by Hispanic Americans to enrich the culture and day-to-day life of the United States.

Today, there is no denying the strength and impact of Hispanic Americans, who are now more than 40 million strong. In my home State of New Mexico, 44 percent of the total population is made up of people of Hispanic descent, which according to the Census Bureau, is the largest proportion of any State in the Union. What has truly been remarkable to me over the years is the extent to which the Hispanic community has thrived in every facet of civic life.

For instance, I am proud to call attention to the remarkable achievement of PFC José F. Valdez, one of 48 Hispanic American Medal of Honor recipients. Born and raised in Governador, NM, José served during World War II near Rosenkrantz, France. He heroically saved the lives of his fellow comrades by engaging in a firefight which allowed the soldiers to escape after an enemy counterattack. Similar tales of bravery are prevalent in the history of Hispanic Americans, who have served with distinction in every U.S. military campaign including our current engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the areas of science, medicine, sport, art, business, and public service, the various achievements of the Hispanic community are immeasurable. This year, Hispanic Business magazine celebrated its 25th anniversary by profiling 500 of the largest Hispanic-owned companies in the United States, a nearly tenfold increase from the magazine's initial listing in 1982. These companies boast total revenues of \$36.6 billion, which is a sizable contribution to the American economy.

Twenty-five of these top-ranked companies join me in calling New Mexico their home. At the top of this list is Manuel Lujan Agencies from Albuquerque, NM, which has also been awarded "Most Admired Company" by New Mexico's top 100 private companies. Also included in this list is Centinel Bank of Taos in Taos, NM, which is one of the very few minority-owned financial institutions in the United States. I am pleased that Manuel Lujan Agencies and Centinel Bank of Taos are joined by such firms as Roses Southwest Papers, Applied Tech Associates, Network and Sparkle Maintenance Inc. The fact, is Hispanics in New Mexico today lead a growing number of firms that help set the pace for a growing economy in my State, and many of them are firms involving high technology, construction, and service industries.

While there is no doubt that Hispanics have fought to protect our freedoms and made advancements in the corporate world, they are also leaving their imprint on the world of entertainment through sports and the arts. Of the athletes currently playing in the National Football League, 24 players are of Hispanic descent. These players

are represented on 16 teams across the country, and during a recent football matchup, Grammy winners Gloria Estefan and the musical group Ozomatli performed the national anthem at the halftime show in honor of this month's celebration. In my home State, music legends like Al Hurricane and the popular Tobias Rene add to the rich cultural contributions being made to our society.

I encourage Americans to take this moment to remember all of the areas of our society that have been influenced by the Hispanic community. I would also like you to recall the sacrifices Hispanics have made to preserve the liberties and freedom that make America a beacon of hope to millions around the world. These men and women have stood up as proud Americans and volunteered to protect their families and communities during the global war on terror. Our Nation is stronger because of these men and women. They deserve the gratitude of the Nation for their sacrifices.

The tradition of Hispanic Heritage Month dates back almost 40 years. In 1968, Congress started by designating a week to celebrate Hispanic heritage. By the early 1980s, we decided to extend the designation to cover a month starting on September 15. The extra time has been a necessary and appropriate change to allow us to recognize the long record of contributions Hispanic Americans have made to our communities and to our Nation. I call on the American people to join with all children, families, organizations, communities, churches, cities, and States across the Nation to observe the month with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

#### COMMENDING JIM NICHOLSON

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, it is my distinct pleasure to recognize my friend and fellow Coloradan Jim Nicholson. Although it is with sadness that his resignation takes effect this week, I would like to take this time to commend him for his service as the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Jim is a veteran's veteran. As a West Point graduate, Army Ranger, highly decorated Vietnam war veteran, and 4 years of service as the ambassador to the Holy See, Jim was well prepared and highly qualified for the duties as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Jim was nominated by President Bush to serve as Secretary in December of 2004 and was subsequently confirmed unanimously by the Senate. The confidence bestowed upon Jim Nicholson by the President and all of those who gather here speaks to his unassailable ability to assist our veterans. Sworn into office on February 1, 2004, Jim readily assumed his role as the primary advocate for veterans.

Jim accepted control of the VA at an extremely difficult time and has proven himself to be the right man for the

job. He was asked to serve his country in a new capacity and brought with him a great sense of honor and duty. In this time of war, Jim has worked tirelessly to ensure that the VA meet the current needs of those veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Although there is great urgency in caring for our recently wounded service men and women, Jim has also understood the crucial need to continue to provide the utmost care for our veterans and warriors of past generations. Under his leadership, the VA has earned higher marks for medical services than the private health care industry for customer satisfaction, according to the American Customer Satisfaction Index, for the seventh consecutive year. He has helped to give all our veterans the care they deserve, as they have sacrificed so much for all of us.

I have personally worked with Jim for years. I would especially like to thank him for the instrumental role he played in reinvigorating the construction of a new VA hospital in Aurora on the Fitzsimons campus. Without his support, this project would not have progressed to the point it is at today. This hospital will prove to be a great asset for our veterans in Colorado, and Secretary Nicholson should be commended for his efforts.

As we celebrate the service of Secretary Nicholson, I had also like to take this opportunity to thank his family, notably his wife Suzanne, whose endless support is undoubtedly valued and is greatly appreciated. Jim Nicholson has served this country with honor and valor in many capacities. I will certainly miss Secretary Nicholson, and wish him and his family the best of luck in the future. I thank him for his exceptional service on behalf of all our veterans.

#### 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE U.S. ARMY SPACE AND MISSILE DEFENSE COMMAND

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, it is with great pleasure that I recognize the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command, an organization that is headquartered in Huntsville, AL.

On this day, October 3, 1957, the Army activated the Redstone Anti-Missile Missile Systems Office. With a staff of 5 military and 19 civilians, this organization set the foundation of the Army's space and missile defense programs. From these beginnings, they have become an international organization of more than 2,000 military and civilians devoted to providing around-the-clock space and missile defense research and development and operational capabilities. I wish to express my congratulations to the Army community in northern Alabama for their splendid record of achievement in space and missile defense and to ask my colleagues to join me in saluting them for their contributions to the security of our Nation and her warfighters.

This organization and the U.S. Army have led the Nation in space and missile defense from the 1957 authorization to proceed with the Nike Zeus system to the deployed hit-to-kill national and theater missile defense systems today. Along the way, the Army's missile defense team has achieved a number of significant milestones: the first successful intercept of an intercontinental ballistic missile, ICBM, in 1962; the first deployed ballistic missile defense system in the United States in 1975; the first non-nuclear intercept of an ICBM in 1984; the first kinetic energy intercept of a tactical missile in 1987; and the first directed energy intercepts of rockets in flight in 1996. Their battletested products are currently deployed around the world defending our Nation, our service members, and our allies.

In 1957, missile defense brought a new facet to the Army's exploration of space in the 1950s. As missions changed, it remained constant. In the 1970s, the Army returned to space exploration with a precedent setting tactical exploration program. From the 1970s through Operation Desert Storm, the first space war, space has become an integral element of the warfighter's life. Since then, this organization has become the focal point for Army Space. They provide research and development to expand the possibilities provided by space. They have established a brigade of space soldiers dedicated to space superiority and the application of space technology. And today, space soldiers and technologies continue to provide battlefield communications, satellite imagery and analysis, three-dimensional visualization, guidance information, precise early warning of threat missiles, and a host of other space-based capabilities tailored for the warfighter.

Together with their Government and industry teammates, the future of space and missile defense rests in the hands of the men and women who work in this Army organization in Huntsville and Colorado Springs, as well as other locations throughout the world.

Mr. President, I salute Huntsville, the surrounding area, and the hard-working men and women of this great region of our country. Most importantly, I wish to extend a warm and hearty congratulations to the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command team for a job well done, and best wishes for its continued success during the next 50 years and beyond. Secure the high ground.

#### NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, this past Saturday was National Public Lands Day. On September 29, hundreds of thousands of citizens from across the country volunteered to give their time to improve our public lands. These volunteers cleared obstructed trails, picked up litter, planted trees, removed invasive species, and taught

young Cub Scouts and Girl Scouts about camping. I commend all volunteers for their commitment.

Now in its 14th year, National Public Lands Day has become the largest grassroots volunteer effort on behalf of our public parks, rivers, lakes, forests, rangelands, and beaches. Last year, an estimated \$11 million worth of labor intensive work was carried out, and this year it is expected that \$12 million of improvements were added to America's public lands.

On Wednesday, September 27, the front page of USA Today displayed a picture of Coeur d'Alene, ID, with a headline that read "No end in sight for Idaho's growth." The article went on to provide a breakdown of how Idaho's economy has remained strong despite the current slump in the housing market. It reads, "[An] ingredient in Idaho's boom has been the 'amenities business'—hiking, hunting, fishing, skiing, whitewater rafting—that attracts tourists and new residents, from billionaires to young outdoor enthusiasts."

Today Idaho is experiencing a new brand of tourists and a new brand of neighbors moving in down the street. These people are focused on the vigorous quest for a quality of life that includes the enjoyment of the outdoors. What ties the third generation Idahoan to a newcomer is an appreciation for the resources and the value that multiple uses contribute to our livelihoods and communities.

The USA Today article also points out that "[t]he federal government owns about two-thirds of the land in Idaho, mostly national forests. The state has 21 million acres of roadless wilderness, about the size of South Carolina and more than any state except Alaska." Public lands have much to offer and are very beneficial for Idaho.

There are a myriad of different resources that can be responsibly harvested or extracted from our public lands. From sustainably managed forests to livestock use to oil and geothermal potential, these lands hold the resources Americans rely on to achieve the standard of living that we have today.

Using the resources on our own public lands, as opposed to relying on foreign resources, affords us the opportunity to fund schools, highways, and national defense, all the while easing the financial burden on the taxpayers.

There are those, however, who would prefer to see land management agencies take more of a preservationist role, prohibiting access to our national forests, parks, beaches, and rangelands and leaving nature to run its course. This is not a value that many Idahoans hold, and neither do I.

We must actively manage our lands so that the recreational and resource benefit can be utilized by every American citizen. Under certain circumstances, active management includes limited access in specific areas;